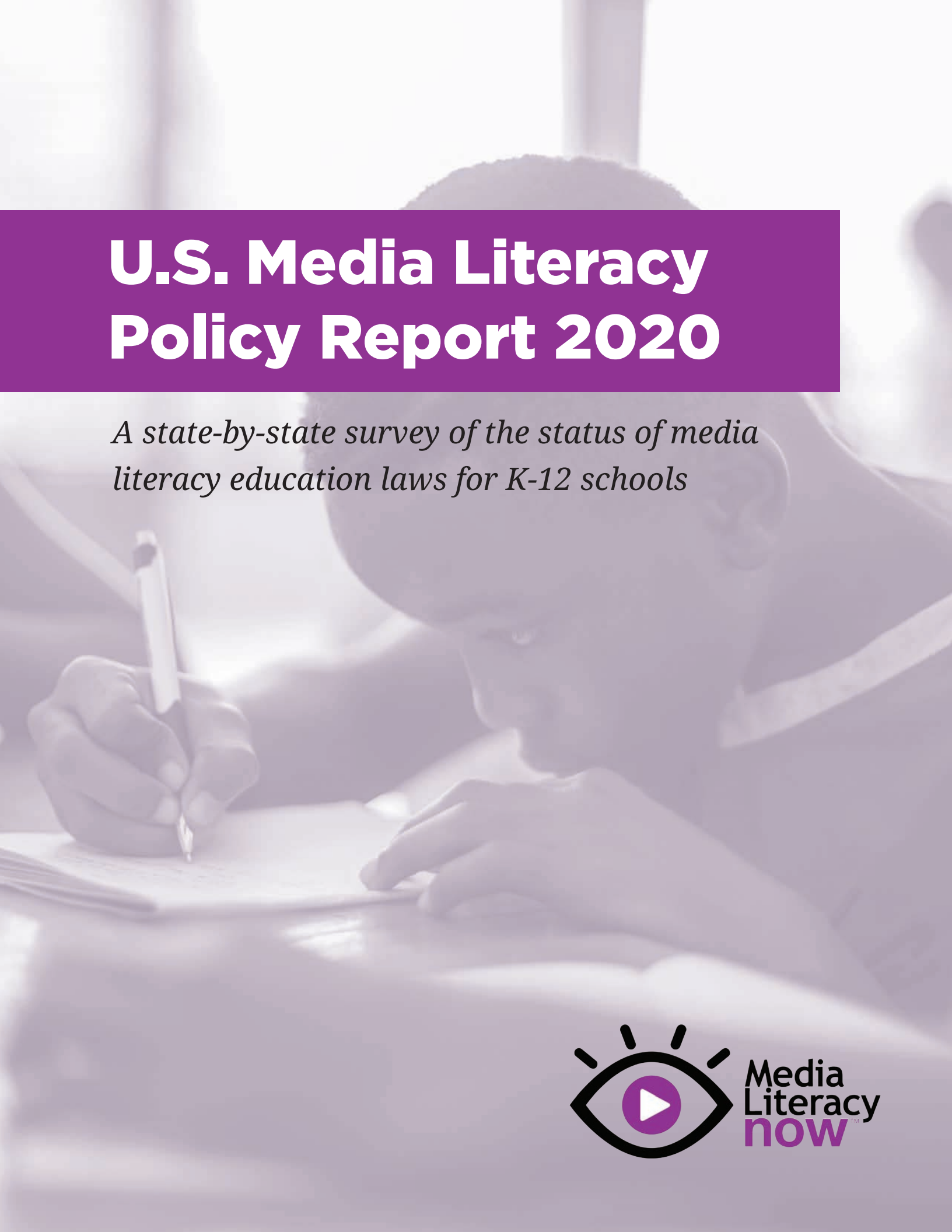


U.S. Media Literacy Policy Report 2020

A state-by-state survey of the status of media literacy education laws for K-12 schools

Media Literacy now™

Data collected and analyzed by Media Literacy Now. Media Literacy Now is a nonprofit advocacy organization with a mission to drive policy change in every state and at the national level to ensure all K-12 students receive comprehensive media literacy education and skills, now and in the future. All data was collected in 2019 based on public information covering legislative efforts and is free of political affiliation or viewpoint.

January 2020

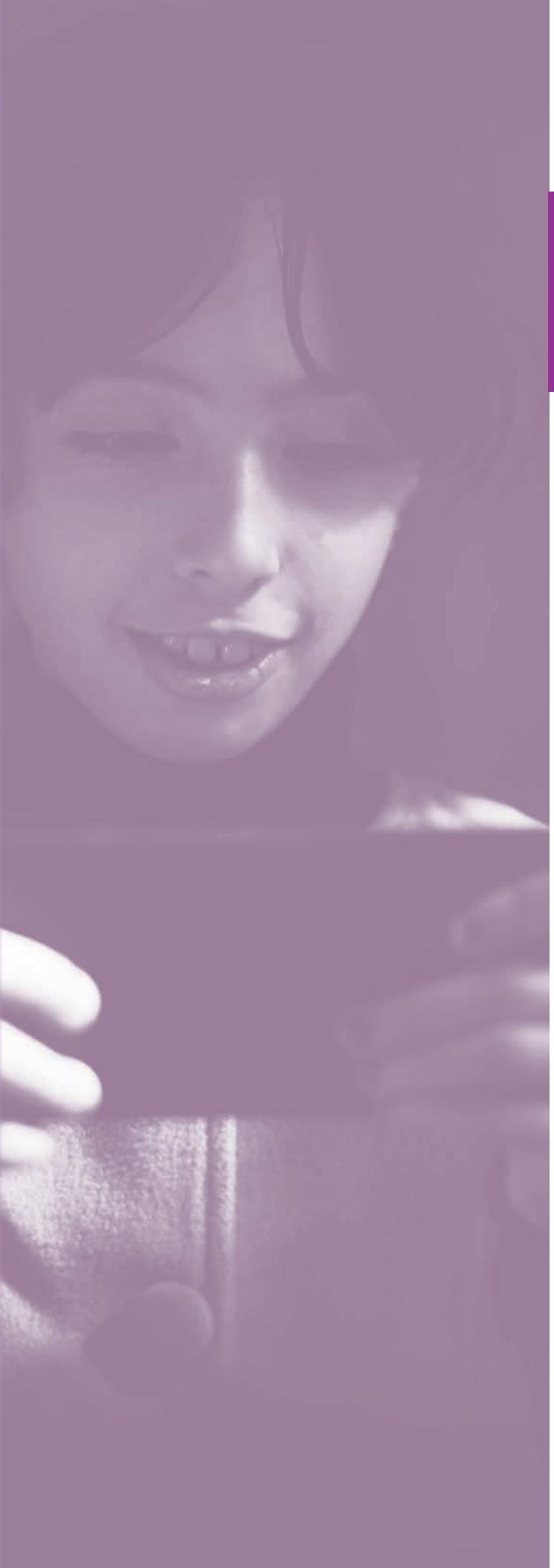


TABLE OF CONTENTS

4 The Challenge Before Us

8 The Findings

10 State Laws

18 Looking to 2020

Media Literacy now™

THE CHALLENGE BEFORE US

Media literacy is an imperative for 2020

Now, two decades into the 21st century, it is becoming clear to U.S. lawmakers and education policymakers that state education and curriculum policy must be updated to reflect the needs of the world we live in. If our children and our society are to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing global communications environment, media literacy skills are imperative. This report presents the reasons why media literacy education policy is so important, and which states are making progress.

However, statutory language is not the final step. Implementation is key. The level of implementation in these states has not been evaluated for this report. More research is needed to determine how the laws are taking effect, or not, at the state administrative and school district level, and how evolving standards are contributing.

The world has changed and our children are in crisis.

Smartphones and social media ecosystems have changed the game, and the playing field. Now, through devices, children are directly accessible at any time of day by peers, corporations, and even extremist recruiters and predators. The ability of individuals and entities to circumvent parental oversight is constantly evolving. Families seeking to instill their own values in their children are facing new challenges, for which many are unprepared.

Students in the U.S., for the most part, are not learning skills to discern the quality of information they find online. They are not learning how to make informed, reasoned decisions about how to use the information and tools at their disposal, or the ethics of those decisions. Meanwhile, they are spending many hours per day navigating a sprawling media

landscape often filled with misinformation, portrayals of violence, opioid drug abuse, misogyny, and more.

Deliberate and politically-motivated disinformation campaigns, often centerstage in media, are drastically shaping public perceptions and policy. Distrust of news has contributed to widespread cynicism. The growing belief that "nothing is true" is a danger to our society, and most of all, to developing children and youth who are learning to discern what is real and true, and how to behave as engaged citizens, responsible consumers, healthy individuals, and informed creators of content.

What can be done? Require media literacy education.

It is the role of state legislators to set education priorities in the 50 states. While in many states local districts have final control of the curriculum, state-level policymakers still play an important role by directing departments of education on where to place priorities for updating standards that guide the selection of curriculum.

Media Literacy Now (MLN) is calling on state lawmakers to institute media literacy education within state statutes and then oversee implementation. Permanent statutes establish that media literacy curriculum is considered an essential element in education and not dependent on temporary funding or individual champions. These policies will contribute to ensuring a future population that uses critical thinking skills with media-delivered information to make decisions: as citizens of a democracy; as participants in a modern economy; and for the health and well-being of themselves and their families.

One place to begin is with the MLN Media Literacy, Digital Citizenship, and Internet Safety Advisory Committee Model Bill, which requires the state education policymaking body—usually the state Department of Education or Board of Education—to convene a committee of experts and stakeholders. This committee begins the process of identifying best practices and making recommendations for further state action, to find solutions to the barriers that prevent media literacy lessons from being

implemented in K-12 schools. This bill maintains the preference in most states that decisions on curriculum are made at the local level.

Where does media literacy policy stand as we enter 2020?

As of the end of 2019, Media Literacy Now completed a preliminary survey of all state laws to compare state progress and to encourage further expeditious progress. As we enter another legislative session in 2020 for many states, lawmakers across the country will push to increase media literacy in schools. This report is meant to guide and inspire, but also to empower legislators, educators, parents, and concerned individuals to advocate for policy that will promote media literacy curriculum in local schools.

We are pleased to note that some state legislatures have already taken action to address the urgent need for media literacy education in schools. **There are 14 leading states with some media literacy-related language on the books today.**

Others have taken legislative action by introducing bills and holding hearings and committee votes and floor votes. Each year, new states join MLN in introducing the model bill or other bills, leading to a growing awareness among policymakers of the urgent need for students to learn the essential life skills that media literacy supports.

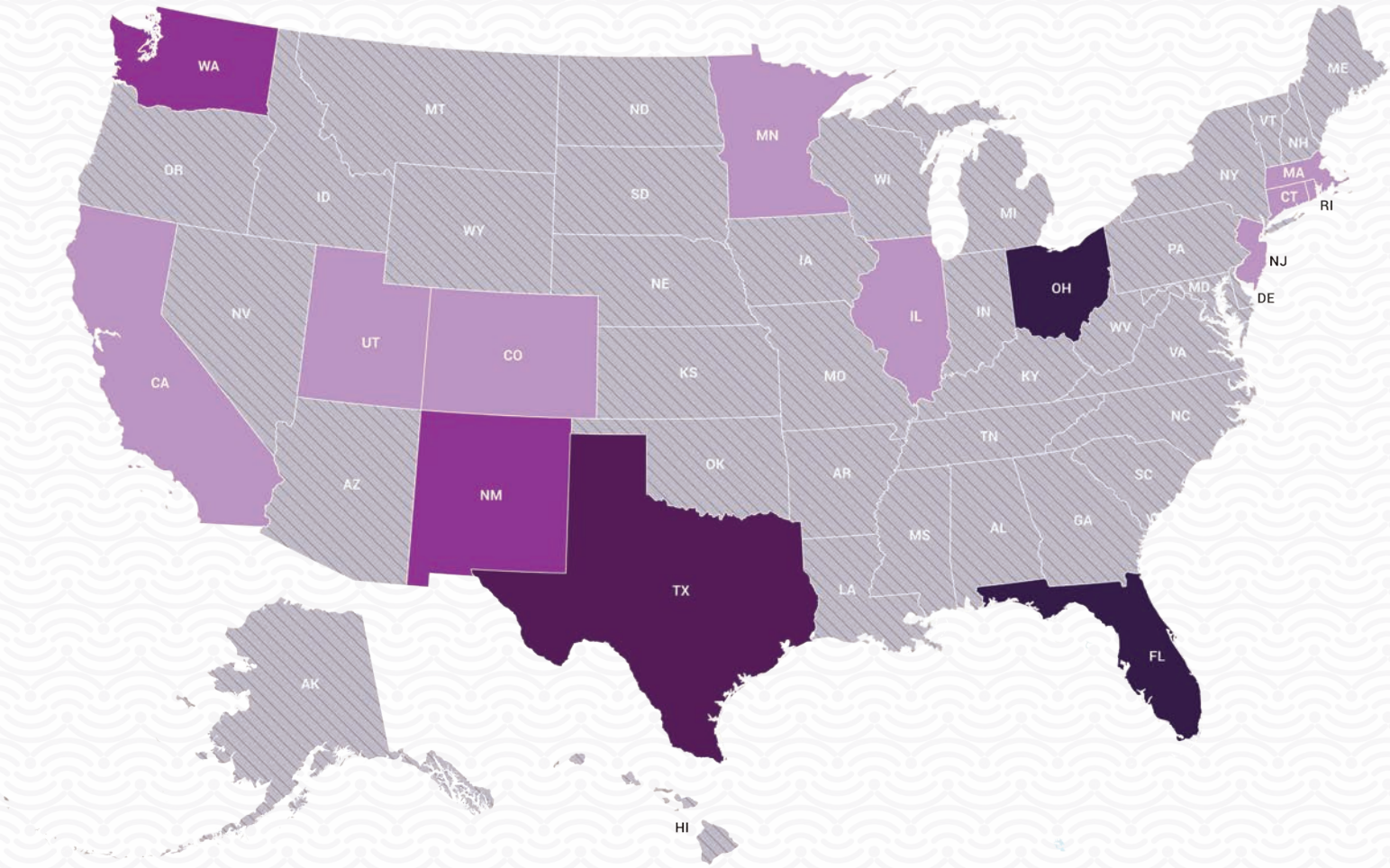
It's worth noting that in our survey and in general, we believe it is important to use the term "media literacy." Media literacy is a well-established international academic field. Using this term ensures that those who are implementing the policy as well as choosing resources and curriculum have access to the most relevant, up to date, evidence-based curriculum resources based on decades of academic study and rigorous evaluation.

We have also included "digital citizenship" in our survey as a close proxy for media literacy, and which includes many of the key skills of media literacy. Digital citizenship comes under the umbrella of media

literacy. However, because “citizenship” implies preferred values, it is not equivalent to the pure literacy skills delivered with media literacy education, which can be applied in all senses that traditional literacy is applied, allowing the literate person to learn and to develop or apply their own values.

We have specifically not included “digital literacy,” as this term refers primarily to knowing how to use the devices that deliver information as opposed to developing critical thinking skills around the information accessed.

THE FINDINGS



ADVANCED LEADER	STRONG LEADER	PROGRESSING LEADER	EMERGING LEADER	
Florida	Texas	New Mexico	California	Minnesota
Ohio		Washington	Colorado	New Jersey
			Connecticut	Rhode Island
			Illinois	Utah
			Massachusetts	

United States Electoral Votes by FreeVectorMaps.com

This is an all-hands-on-deck issue. We need to wake up.

—Utah State Representative Keven Stratton

14

STATES

have media literacy language on the books today

STATE LAWS

For the purpose of this report, we have reviewed state laws only. We have not reviewed regulatory action or other administration-side education policy. Notably, we have also not reviewed implementation. In most cases, we have only included state laws that use the terms media literacy or digital citizenship. This report presents our interpretation of the laws and their significance to media literacy development within the population.

Progress Report: ADVANCED LEADER

In our survey, we found that only two states have strong statutory language on media literacy: Florida and Ohio.

These states require that the Department of Education develop standards that integrate media literacy across the curriculum at all grade levels.

Florida

In Florida, a media literacy requirement was first established in public K-12 educational statutes in 2008 as a requirement within language arts instruction. The law was then strengthened in 2013 to elevate media literacy to require its integration into the standards for all subjects in K-12 public schools.

An excerpt from Florida's legislation:

> *Next Generation Sunshine State Standards establish the core content of the curricula to be taught in the state and specify the core content knowledge and skills that K-12 public school students are expected to acquire. Standards must be rigorous and relevant and provide for the logical, sequential progression of core curricular content that*

incrementally increases a student's core content knowledge and skills over time. Curricular content for all subjects must integrate critical-thinking, problem-solving, and workforce-literacy skills; communication, reading, and writing skills; mathematics skills; collaboration skills; contextual and applied-learning skills; technology-literacy skills; information and media literacy skills; and civic-engagement skills.

Ohio

Ohio established media literacy as a requirement in a 2009 omnibus bill. The legislature required that statewide academic standards include the development of media literacy skills. The language was slightly revised in 2013.

An excerpt from Ohio's legislation:

The State Board of Education is required to periodically adopt statewide academic standards with "emphasis on coherence, focus, and essential knowledge and that are more challenging and demanding when compared to international standards for kindergarten – 12 in English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.

The Board is also required to ensure that the standards:

- *Include the essential academic content and skills that students are expected to know and be able to do at each grade level that will allow each student to be prepared for postsecondary instruction and the workplace for success in the twenty-first century;*
- *Include the development of skill sets that promote information, media, and technological literacy.*

Progress Report: STRONG LEADER

Texas

In 2019, the Texas legislature passed—by a wide margin on a strong bipartisan vote—a bill stating the state Board of Education must require each school district to incorporate instruction in digital citizenship into the district's curriculum.

The definition of digital citizenship in this statute includes a generally accepted definition of media literacy. However, MLN considers digital citizenship to be a subset of media literacy, not the reverse, as suggested in the Texas legislation. Also, the law requires this instruction to apply to all forms of "digital" communication only, which unnecessarily limits the reach of the instruction.

That said, including this media literacy definition shows strong promise for Texas policy to ultimately integrate comprehensive media literacy across the curriculum.

Texas definition:

> *Digital citizenship means the standards of appropriate, responsible, and healthy online behavior, including the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act on all forms of digital communication.*

Progress Report: PROGRESSING LEADER

These states are moving forward to make significant change.

New Mexico

New Mexico has a set of requirements for high school graduation that includes a certain number of electives, and the state's laws say that media literacy *may* be offered as an elective. The law has been in place since 2009, making New Mexico among the earliest to recognize the value of media literacy, along with Florida and Ohio.

A subsequent effort to *require* that media literacy be offered as an elective failed in 2011. In 2017 New Mexico passed a "memorial" (similar to a resolution), under which the legislature conducted a study of best practices in media literacy education. The legislature then joined to pass MLN's advisory committee legislation on a bipartisan basis by a wide margin in 2019. Unfortunately, that bill was pocket-vetoed by the governor with the idea that the Public Education Department could do this work without a directive from the legislature. However, with House and Senate passage of the bill, the New Mexico legislature had established bipartisan agreement that media literacy is a priority, and approved significant funding for a teacher training program, a key step in bringing media literacy to all classrooms across the state.

Washington

Washington has developed a model pathway for developing and implementing media literacy policy. In 2016, Washington was the first to pass the MLN Media Literacy, Digital Citizenship and Internet Safety model bill. The bill required the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to develop best practices and recommendation for instruction on media literacy in consultation with an advisory committee of experts. The committee met and developed recommendations in 2016 for further legislative action.

In 2017, the legislature passed additional legislation implementing several key committee recommendations, including completing a baseline survey and establishing an online portal to distribute recommended resources. Then, along with New Mexico, the Washington legislature approved substantial funding for teacher training in 2019. Further information on Washington's media literacy policy is available here.

In addition, in 2015 Washington expanded the role of the teacher-librarian to providing instruction in digital citizenship, including how to be critical consumers of information and how to use online resources in thoughtful and strategic ways.

Progress Report: EMERGING LEADER

We are very encouraged by developments in other states in 2019. These states are beginning the conversation, often with a first step of convening and consulting with experts and stakeholders to develop best practices and recommendations using the MLN advisory committee model bill. In alphabetical order:

California

California passed a law in 2018 requiring the Department of Education to make a list of resources and instructional materials on media literacy available to school districts on its website, including media literacy professional development programs for teachers. The bill received a bipartisan vote in the House, but not in the Senate.

Colorado

Colorado enacted the MLN advisory committee bill in 2019, convened the advisory committee, and completed a report by the end of the year. Leadership there expects to introduce new legislation to implement the strategies developed by the committee. The Department of Education has shown strong support of the action.

Connecticut

Connecticut passed an MLN advisory committee bill in 2017 and the Department of Education convened the committee. The committee has prepared a report the Board of Education expects to review in January 2020. Connecticut also passed a law in 2015 requiring that schools teach safe use of social media.

Illinois

Illinois passed an internet safety law in 2009 that requires school districts to incorporate into their curriculum a component on internet safety to be taught at least once each school year to students in third grade or above. Recommended topics include safe and responsible use of social networking websites, chat rooms, electronic mail, bulletin boards, instant messaging, and other means of communication on the

internet, and recognizing cyberbullying, online solicitations by sexual predators, and copyright law.

Massachusetts

Massachusetts passed two bills in 2019 requiring the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to include the study of media messages, one within a personal financial literacy education bill and the other within a civics education bill.

Minnesota

Minnesota established information literacy standards in law in 2006. The statute requires the education commissioner to embed technology and information literacy standards into the state's academic standards and graduation requirements and review them at least every 10 years. The commissioner is directed to seek recommendations for the standards from school media specialists.

New Jersey

In 2014, New Jersey passed a law requiring schools to teach safe and ethical use of social media.

Rhode Island

Rhode Island passed an MLN advisory committee bill in 2017. The MLN Rhode Island chapter developed a report based on this legislation making recommendations. The report [available here as a pdf] has been presented to the Department of Education.

Utah

Utah passed a law in 2015 that helps each school establish a digital citizenship program that *"empowers a student to make smart media and online choices."*

The law enables school community councils, which already exist in the state, to access funds to implement digital citizenship education. It also allows the councils to engage nonprofit organizations for help and support in their efforts to bring digital citizenship training and resources

to their schools. The Utah law became the foundation for the MLN advisory committee model bill first passed in Washington state.

Progress Report: NOT EVALUATED

While it's encouraging that 14 states are now on their way to establishing media literacy curriculum as a priority in K-12 schools, much more needs to be done to ensure all students have access to these essential life skills. Of the 36 other states, many have not yet begun the process.

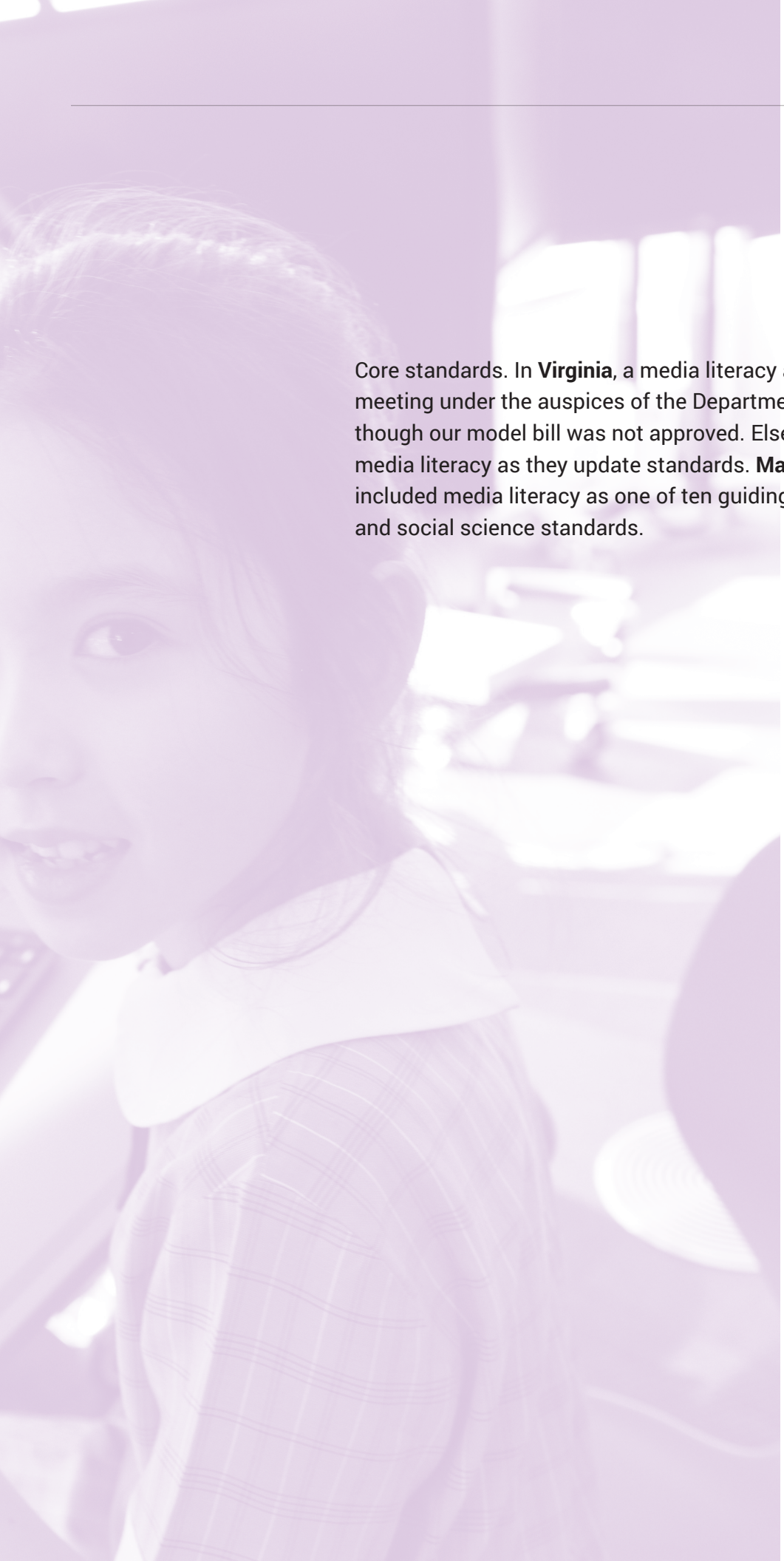
There is hope and enthusiasm, however. Every year since the founding of MLN in 2013, more states have joined the effort, with lawmakers introducing legislation and holding hearings. Even when these efforts don't result in new laws, media literacy education is elevated as a priority as more lawmakers become aware of the need through hearings and other policymaker education efforts.

For 2020 two new states, **Missouri** and **South Carolina**, have already pre-filed a version of the MLN model bill and we look forward to featuring them in next year's report. Others will file again and still others are continuing consideration of bills that include media literacy-related language.

Although MLN prefers permanent policy in the laws of the state, some states will take a different path.

For example, in **Hawaii**, where MLN's bill is pending, the constitution gives all power to make education policy to the Department of Education. The legislature cannot institute a requirement for media literacy curriculum or standards. MLN will work with the department to establish permanent policy when Hawaii's bill is approved.

Other states are making progress in different ways. **Minnesota**, for example, has added a media literacy section to its version of Common



Core standards. In **Virginia**, a media literacy advisory committee is meeting under the auspices of the Department of Education, even though our model bill was not approved. Elsewhere, states are adding media literacy as they update standards. **Massachusetts**, for example, included media literacy as one of ten guiding principles in its new history and social science standards.

MEDIA LITERACY MATTERS IN 2020

Media literacy is *the* literacy of the 21st century. It is an essential element in education, on par with reading and writing, given most of our information today comes in visual form and online. More than that, democracy depends on a literate population and the U.S. economy is more and more reliant on an educated workforce. Today, everyone must know how to decode media messages, to assess the shaping effects of those messages on us as individuals and as a society, and to create media thoughtfully and conscientiously.

This report shows that progress is being made, but action is too slow compared to the urgent need. More research must be done on how updated standards and regulations are contributing to improved media literacy education in each state, and on how laws and standards are being implemented in schools across the country.

How you can help

- **Legislators:** Sponsor or co-sponsor the model bill, which is gaining bipartisan support across the country. Ask state education officials to report on implementation of existing laws.
- **Individuals:** Call your representatives and senators at the state level and ask them to support media literacy education policy. Join your state chapter to support ongoing efforts. Use MLN tools to advocate with teachers and administrators in your local schools.
- **Educators:** Use MLN tools to advocate for media literacy education with school district teachers, administrators, education associations, parents, and state legislators.

Definition of media literacy

from MLN Advisory Committee Model Bill

Media literacy shall be considered a broad term that encompasses consumption and production of media and digital products and communication technology of all kinds, and is defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create and take action with all forms of communication, and encompasses the foundational skills of digital citizenship and internet safety including the norms of appropriate, responsible, ethical, and healthy behavior, and cyberbullying prevention.

Media Literacy now™

Media Literacy Now
15 Main Street, Suite 102
Watertown, MA 02472

(617) 744-9563

medialiteracynow.org
info@medialiteracynow.org
@MediaLitNow
MediaLiteracyNow